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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ON THE HUSTINGS FOR THE PACKAGE: ALL
POLITICS TEND TO BE LOCAL

Classified By: COM Tina Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: USOP outreach efforts to encourage understanding of the Ahtisaari package have uncovered some interesting trends, particularly with regard to Kosovar Albanian perceptions of the document. By far, decentralization as it affects southern Kosovo has proven to be the most contentious aspect of the Ahtisaari package, with many hard-line Kosovo Albanians labeling it a "land giveaway" to Serbia. Overall, we have found in our discussions that perceived "concessions" to the Kosovo Serbs continue to engender resentment -- not because most moderate Kosovar Albanians object to addressing Serb concerns, but because of the deeply-held belief that all of these benefits have been given without the Serb side offering any compromises of its own. Concerns about municipal links to Serbia, the future of the security force, and the Macedonian border have struck us as ventilation more than genuine disgruntlement, and in fact do not come up much in discussions with average Kosovars. In specific locales, the stresses are deeper: the Albanians of Peja, for example, clearly view the Pec Patriarchate with deep resentment, a longer-term problem we will need to address through mediation and close contacts. The USOP public outreach effort continues and intensifies through March and April, with both Serb and Albanian communities scheduled for town hall meetings in tandem with OSCE and UK efforts. End summary.

12. (SBU) As part of our Public Outreach Working Group initiative, USOP officers have been speaking throughout Kosovo, explaining the Ahtisaari package and giving Kosovars a chance to air their views. The events are organized by USAID grantee AED, working with community-based NGOs. The UK Office has joined with us in this campaign, in addition to a related program sponsored by OSCE. We are intensifying our outreach in the next few weeks, particularly utilizing USOP and UK personnel who speak Serbian and Albanian. This past week in Peja/Pec, we were joined by AAK MP Gylnaze Sylja; in Novo Brdo, we were joined by Counselor to the Deputy Prime Minister Naim Behlolu.

Decentralization

13. (SBU) Without question, in all these meetings and discussions, decentralization has emerged as the key theme of Kosovar Albanian attention. We spent March 8 in Novo Brdo, Kosovo's poorest municipality and one of its most ethnically mixed, though most participants who turned out were ethnic Albanian. Every single question over a three-hour meeting was about what the plan meant for Novo Brdo. Responding to our opening position that decentralization was about bringing government closer to the people and improving the quality of governance at the local level, an exceptionally skeptical (but polite) resident asked if decentralization were "real" or "political." We noted that decentralization was a political concept in that it was the foundation for political systems in the U.S. and elsewhere designed to devolve authority downward, but added that it was also necessary in Kosovo to demonstrate that minority communities would enjoy robust -- and real -- rights in the overall context of a majoritarian state. USOP reps pointed out to town hall participants that Novo Brdo and the surrounding area would be the most affected -- in a positive sense -- by the implementation of the Ahtisaari package, and noted that we are gearing up our assistance programs to work with new and newly-reconfigured municipalities.

"Giving too much to Serbs"

14. (SBU) Beside decentralization, other themes -- notably the "lack of concessions" by the Serb negotiating team -- have arisen as problematic for Kosovar Albanians. At a discussion at the Kosovo Institute of Journalism, this topic came up, with students arguing that the Serbs were both a numerically small part of the population and had refused to negotiate in good faith. We pointed out (a case unfortunately supported by the March 4 disruption by Serb

hardliners of the moderate Serb meeting in Gracanica) that Serbs in Kosovo are not empowered to present alternate views, but that this only increases the need for Kosovar Albanians to demonstrate their willingness to reach out to Serbs. Every church desecration, USOP reps noted, every stoning of a school bus, every crossing out the Serbian name of a town on a road sign, and every angry word hurts Kosovo and undermines the work of those who are supporting its development.

15. (C) By far the most strident anti-Serb rhetoric came in Peja/Pec, and took the form of opposition to the provisions on the protection of religious sites, particularly the special protective zones that prohibit some forms of development. Citizens of Peja expressed ill-founded concerns that the Pec Patriarchate would cut off the city's supply of drinking water or would bar access to the road leading into the Rugova Gorge. The difficulties of reconciliation in Peja/Pec are magnified by historical bad blood -- Serbs set fire to the historical center of the town in 1999 -- and the fact that the staff and nuns who run the Patriarchate are isolated and hardcore in their nationalist views. (USOP will attempt to do some fence mending between patriarchate staff and town officials, using the good offices of Father Sava from Decani, though the hurdle is significant. USOP recently succeeded in urging Peja major Lajci to lift a building restriction on construction at the Patriarchate, one step in the right direction.)

16. (SBU) A lack of understanding of the double-majority provisions of the document has also been a constant since Ahtisaari's initial presentation on February 2. While the provision is limited to eight types of legislation dealing exclusively with minority rights, we have been asked repeatedly whether the provision means that Serbs can veto an Assembly declaration of independence. We have also been asked whether this means the minority can amend the constitution over the will of the majority. Our public outreach events provide an opportunity to refute these basic misinterpretations of the package.

Things that have not come up

¶17. (SBU) Notably, in all these discussions and many more, no Kosovar Albanian has asked about the three northern Serb municipalities. No one has raised the status of north Mitrovica, nor has anyone questioned the provisions for the north Mitrovica university or hospital. No one has questioned KFOR and no one has expressed concern about possible Belgrade attempts to block or undermine the process.

Also, we have never been asked publicly about a possible Russian veto of a Security Council resolution. Although our Kosovar counterparts have used the "i" word freely, no one has asked us when and if independence is coming. Only one self-proclaimed war veteran said that he objected to the disbanding of the KPC, saying that it should become the new national army. That does not mean that these issues have no place in Kosovar thinking, only that ordinary citizens appear more drawn to addressing their local concerns than these larger, global ones.

Comment:

¶18. (SBU) The outreach campaign continues, providing useful insight into Kosovar Albanian and Serb thinking about the Ahtisaari plan and giving us the opportunity to correct misperceptions about key provisions. There is still a considerable amount of work to be done; March and April will see an intensification of our efforts, in tandem with OSCE and others (COMKFOR, SRSG Ruecker, Kosovar officials including the Prime Minister and opposition leader Thaci) engaged in the outreach program. End Comment.

¶19. (SBU) USOP clears this message in its entirety for release to UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW